

FRAGMENT  
**Nº 01**

# intro- fucktion

— Stacey Sacks

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Stacey Sacks

SQUIRM (the book)  
Fragment No.1, introfucktion  
Documented Artistic Research Project (Doctoral Thesis)  
Stacey Sacks  
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Back - Notebook, August 2016  
Front - Animation still from a *fleshy cartoon*.

*this book is dedicated to my father*

*Frank Sacks*

*who taught me how to make people laugh, then showed me how to cry*

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*give listeners and readers stones to hold  
preferably rocks from the sea or streams*

Read this fragile and porous thing  
as clouds passing or shapes of bodies in space or shadows  
growing long on the ground  
is that too *flummig*?<sup>1</sup> Sorry.

Read it  
loosely

except for those places when it's tight. Then read  
it closely and scaled up to the extreme close-up  
of a micro-mitochondrial DNA strand in the  
abyss of the dark-deep retina of a salamander's eye.  
As a simple example.

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<sup>1</sup> *flummig* is Swedish for 'airy-fairy' or 'wishy-washy'.

This reflective document or fictional ethnography or creative non-fiction  
or assemblage of performing essays, is collectively entitled

# SQUIRM

What follows is a pastiche, a series of excavations and vivisections of W(w)hiteness through clowning, making, thinging. This eclectic mash-up of history, memory and trauma comprises my documented artistic research project based in the Department of Acting, which is on Valhallavägen in Stockholm. Valhalla being Viking Heaven. Well, half of it, the other half being Freyja's domain, which is often excluded; but that's another story.

The project unfolds from the original question: as an actor, which bodies is it appropriate for me to inhabit? Via hyper-disciplinary experiments of the impulse and what it means to be 'on' the moment, the research fabricates a series of *clowters*, performed entanglements of clown and character.

The origins of the word 'clown' are myriad, ranging from *cloyne* meaning 'man of rustic or coarse manners, boor, peasant' to the Icelandic *klunni*, 'clumsy, boorish fellow' to the Latin *colonus* meaning 'colonist, farmer' though the latter is less likely.<sup>2</sup>

The word 'character' comes from Greek *kharakter*, meaning 'engraved mark' or 'symbol or imprint on the soul', or an 'instrument for marking'. It emerges from *kharassein* 'to engrave', and from *kharax*, 'pointed stake'.<sup>3</sup>

As experimentation with productive discomfort, clowters perform trans-generational hauntings while animating and satirising unanswerable questions of W(w)hiteness, privilege and colonial logic. At the intersections of histories, they dig through remnants of collective memory, personal genealogy and shame, in the hope of reassembling new, sharper ways of giving and receiving attention. Clowters and pages from notebooks will interrupt this text as they have done my life and work over the course of this making, unannounced and often illogical.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=clown> (accessed 5 October 2014).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=character> (accessed 12 April 2016).

or  
**this untethered buffoon**

or  
**the Trickster in Everything**

The project has had multiple names. Not so long ago it was

· **SATYRIC BODIES** ·

*fleshy cartoons in dialogue with the not yet and the already dead*

Before that

**Fabricating Trickster?**

I ask my supervisors. No reply about that yet.

How about

**WHITE WOMAN SHUT UP**

· **THE GHOST AND THE POWER** ·

*idiotic and impulsive bodies excavating and vivisectioning  
W(w)hiteness to discover methods for re-wiring imperial minds*

or

**TheCastleTheFortressTheTower\_a bunny**

???

Originally I applied for this PhD with the title (it's not all about the title but it is):

## The Improvisational Trickster

*excavating the architecture of comedy through the post-colonial body in unintentional exile*

At the time, I thought it imperative to make a pompous title if one is to complete a PhD. Soon after I lost all the capitals, then 'the' as a definitive article became problematic as well as the bolding and the rest. So:

### improvising trickster...

And that's a brief history of the ongoing titles besieging this inquiry. Every attempt to pin down, categorise and frame, quickly transforms into something other yet still stirring around the same. The doing of everything in this project resides on the borders, across the surface of the skin that holds the organs in.

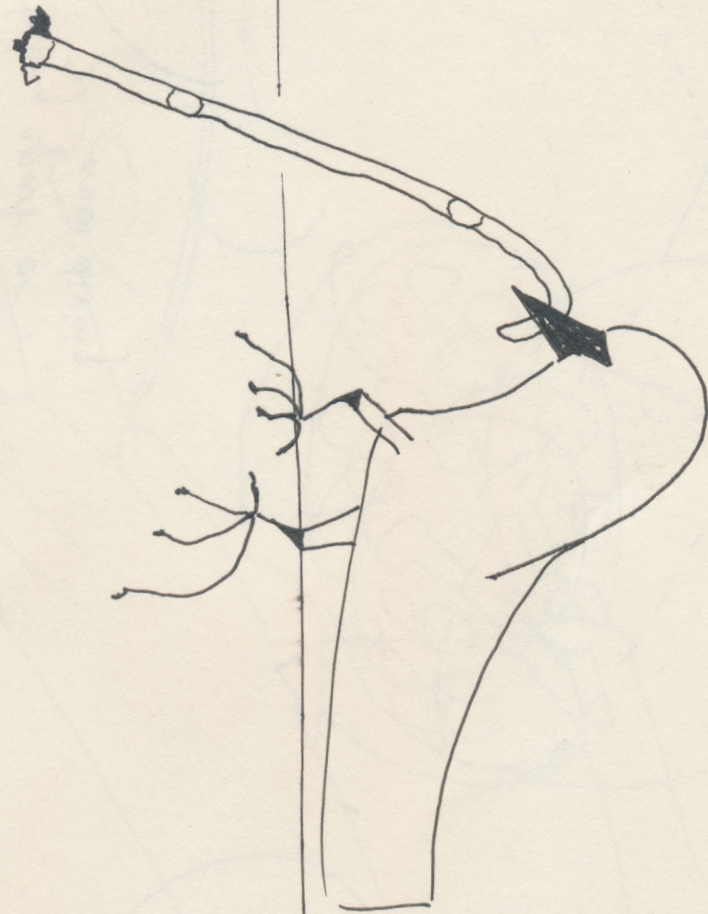
Just like Brazilian painter and installation artist Lygia Clark's 'Discovery of the Organic Line (Descoberta da Linha Organica)' (1954),<sup>4</sup> a painting where the frame is part of the work itself, these titles reveal perpetually transforming sites hinging between ~~humxn~~ and ~~non-humxn~~ bodies, material, genre, and continents.

The words Satyr and Buffoon draw attention to the hybrid and parodical nature of this work, here on the page, but also mainly on the stage in the studio through this body in the city, metro, graveyard, museum and forest. It's a series of uncanny combinations, a convergence of (shallow) complexities and (fixed) uncertainties.

A wobbly collection.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/clark-lygia/artworks/> (accessed 23 May 2019).

The bird + the worm.



Notebook, May 2015

## What about **slippery trickster?**

Tricky subjectivities and ungraspable domains of this unstable thing flings us all together into uncertain realms and I'm trying to be helpful here but finding it challenging. Sorry.

This is meant to be an introfucktion not an apology.

~~Self-doubt fuck off~~

Sorry

It has been a process of becoming lost in labyrinthine ways and now comes the time for sharpening, honing, zoning in. Only this time with the gift of hindsight, as Walter Benjamin's angel flying backwards towards the future, witnessing 'one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage' (1969, p.257).



Valhallavägen studio, 2018



Perhaps I can quote painter Salvador Dali's advice by saying the point is not to eliminate confusion but to spread it! And perhaps I'm not quoting so much as appropriating this particular notion like an academic magpie, searching for alibis to justify these probings.

Just what is appropriate appropriation? So we are back at

## SQUIRM



Animation still: *a fleshy cartoon*



Intervention at the FOLK exhibition 'From racial types to DNA sequences', September 2018.  
© Håkon Bergseth/ The Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology

For this title I am indebted to a conversation about discomfort with Frederico Settler, Sociologist of Religion at the University of Kwazulu-Natal (KZN) near Durban, South Africa.

After witnessing my performance intervention at the FOLK exhibition 'From racial types to DNA sequences' at the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology in September 2018, Settler writes in an email to me:

I am proposing that instead of seeking to quell or soothe the dis-ease that is generated by encounters with difference, or confrontation of the self as (white) other – that we look to practice staying with a posture of discomfort – in order to access discomfort as an analytical and methodological category.

Frankly put: just because I feel uncomfortable that your blackness/queerness seemingly takes up so much space, does not entitle me to ask that you explain to me how this came to be so, or that you should moderate yourself, nor does it entitle me to ask that you translate your subjectivity in order that I feel less anxiety.

Rather, the discomfort I feel is a disruption of the heteronormative/race privilege I am accustomed to. Discomfort therefore can be seen as a measure of relinquishing privilege (but not one's subjectivity/identity) – a posture of discomfort signals a critical orientation to privilege (just because I feel discomfort does not mean it should be resolved, or pushed out of the body, or dumped on someone else). We should embrace discomfort as an invitation for reflection.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> FG Settler, *Discomfort and Suspicion* (forthcoming).

For me, *squirm* is entering this kind of discomfiting territory: the rising shame. It manifests as pressure, a PUSH, emerging from the word 'impulse', directly from Latin *impulsus* 'a push against, pressure, shock'.<sup>6</sup> *squirm* is staying with the trouble despite an intense desire to run or exit, even when you know there's no escape.

The project allows a coming to face my own biases and blindspots, the buttons that shoot immediate panic up one's spine. It is a constant negotiation, a deep questioning of whose right it is to tell which story, an attunement to various forms of appropriation and recognising the need for a call-out culture, particularly from inside W(w)hiteness, while trying not to become the didactic Whiteness police.

*squirm* is a position I often find myself in, whether it's attempting to enter conversations with my family about Palestine, Israel, queerness, racism, D.T. or whether it's with an audience in Johannesburg having a charged dialogue about W(w)hiteness. *squirm* is about ENTERING dialogue, and requires a distinct listening, as Jean-Luc Nancy (2007, p.14) describes:

To listen is to enter that spatiality by which, at the same time, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me, and from me as well as toward me: it opens me inside me as well as outside, and it is through such a double, quadruple or sextuple opening that a 'self' can take place.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=impulse> (accessed 3 October 2015).



Think of *squirm* as  
slippery as  
cringe-worthy  
productive shame<sup>7</sup> and failure as well as making  
a play of documentation  
clown-o-graphic traces or topographical maps of inner and outer  
landscapes excavated by a clown in the academy  
being where it is, doing what it's doing, listening in new ways, breathing life into so-called  
inanimate objects, alone and together with piles of dead and alive material, in search of  
decolonial aesthesis or sensation  
and sharing these penetrations through this vessel, one among many.

<sup>7</sup> For this idea I am indebted to Paul Gilroy in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia* where he speaks of transforming 'paralyzing guilt into a more productive shame' (2005, p.99).



*Tongueing in the studio.*

Mostly through discomfort, *squirm* is a process of discovery; it captures the thing in one small visceral curl of the tongue.

Besides clowning, which forms the fascia of this exploration, one of the central dream things is a notion I now call TONGUE-ING.<sup>8</sup> Tongue-ing is about entering the conversation

or not

sometimes the tongues are about being silenced

or forcefully inserting a voice

or purposefully shutting up

Tongue-ing is about softness, gentleness and radical care. It's also sensual, moist, sensitive, resilient and deeper than you imagine. Giving a good licking evokes both the violent and the erotic. Imagining a new listening, it is, like everything, a paradox.

<sup>8</sup> A word offered to me by writer, curator and Professor Adrian Heathfield, examiner of my Final Seminar, *ARS DIALOGUES* (live at the Castle, October 2019).

# clown alone



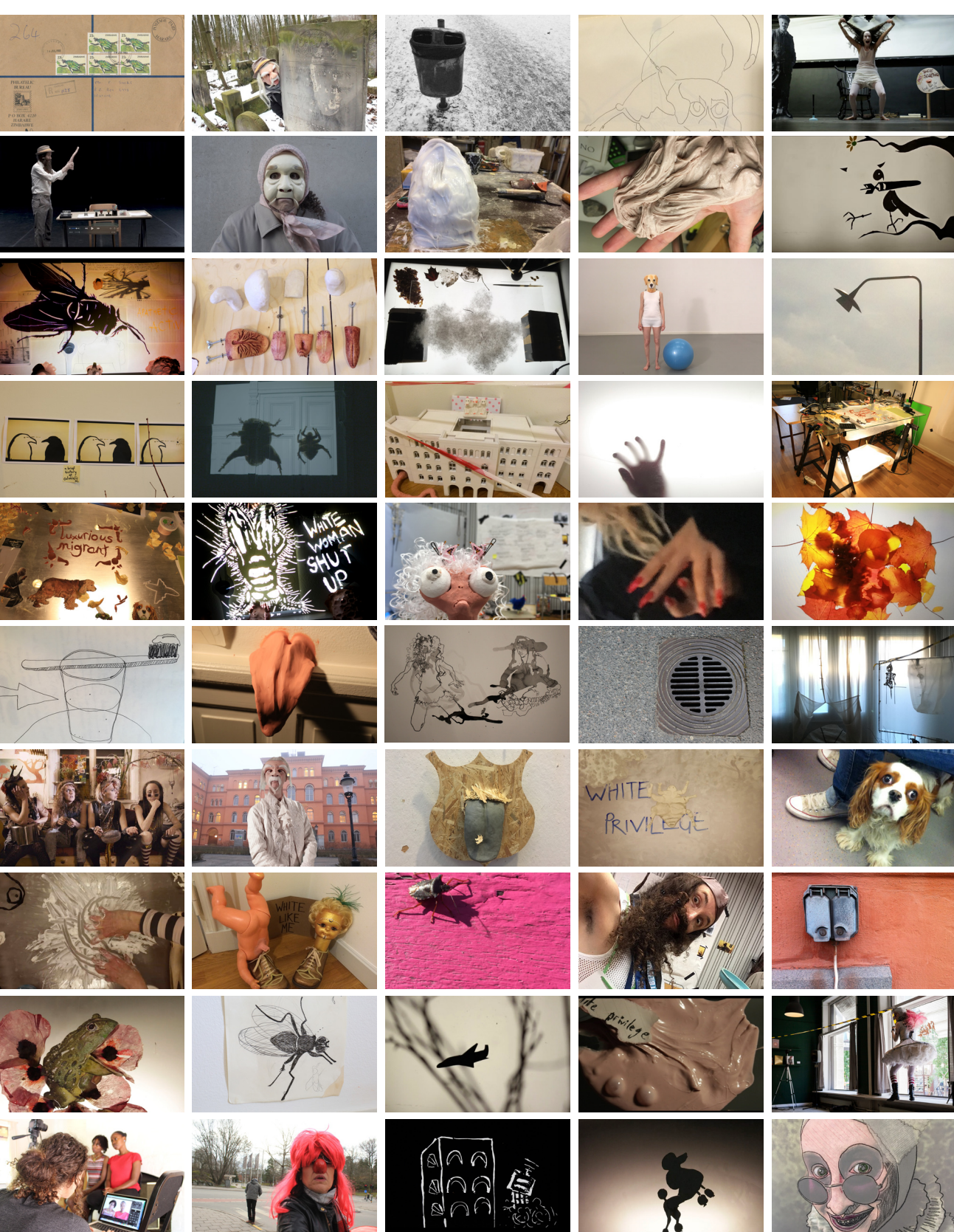
blank sings in the bathroom, *clown alone*, July 2019.

I've been contemplating the role of the comic artist in the world as it is, wondering what service we can perform for our communities at these times, as well as whether our art should be instrumentalised to any end. In contemplating this I draw from Lewis Hyde's (1998, p.311) observation that artistic practice often overlaps

with the pattern of revelation I claim for prophetic tricksters. There is an art-making that begins with pore-seeking (lifting the shame covers, finding the loophole, refusing to guard the secrets), that uncovers a plenitude of material hidden from conventional eyes (readymades are everywhere), and that points toward a kind of mind able to work with that revealed complexity, one called ... the hinge-mind, the translator mind.

Gestures - kineshetics - semiotics  
↳ linked to sound but also spatial awareness  
A.N. Gesture as feedback system a comment as additional info. 4 and the 'raw'

the eyes are listening



By developing a hyper-disciplinary practice I call '*impulsive studio* – spontaneous making, listening, seeing, thinging', I've been experimenting with ways of giving attention in expanded performance forms, wondering if attentiveness to the minutiae of the everyday can affect the way listening happens. It's a space to explore an ethico-aesthetics that incorporates intersectionalities, both humxn and non-humxn. With this specific aim of encouraging new ways of listening, *impulsive studio* mixes theatre, clown and mask games with spontaneous creation in sculpture, drawing, writing, film and animation.

What does it mean to give *shape to things*? The exploration has deepened my understanding and experience of the possible significance of ecological and material forces and their interface with humxn bodies, leading to ethical questions such as: what does it mean to be humxn in these times? In her essay, 'Thinking as the Stuff of the World', environmental justice warrior and Professor of English at the University of Oregon, Stacy Alaimo, (2014, p.15) writes:

[t]racing intra-actions and other modes of entanglement between substances and systems enables political critique and the development of ethical and political modes that do not separate the human from the material world.

The texts are chameleonic, resources for further thing-ing. Thinking alongside Elizabeth Grosz (2005, p.132):

We find the thing in the world as our resource for making things, and in the process we leave our trace on things, we fabricate things out of what we find ... the thing is a question, provocation, incitement, or enigma.

This splintered compendium of my documented artistic research project (Doctoral Thesis) is intended to be read as a companion to the broader constellation of experimental processes and practices that have comprised this exploration. My hope is to contribute to new forms of ethnographic clowning and writing, particularly auto-ethnographic study and cultural inquiry in relationship with issues of race, most particularly W(w)hiteness.

As opposed to autobiography, which (too) broadly defined is a narration of one's own life experiences and personal interpretations of them, auto-ethnography involves personal experiences in the particular context of the surrounding culture, and could be connected with other forms of anthropological writing like fictocriticism and *gonzo* anthropology.<sup>9</sup>

I should probably elucidate what I mean when I use the term *gonzo*.

Notoriously wild journalist Hunter S. Thompson in his book *The Great Shark Hunt: Strange Tales from a Strange Time* (1979/2010, pp.94-95) refers to 'gonzo journalism' as

a style of 'reporting' based on William Faulkner's idea that the best fiction is far more true than any kind of journalism – and the best journalists have always known this.

Which is not to say that fiction is necessarily 'more true' than journalism – or vice versa – but that both 'fiction' and 'journalism' are artificial categories; and that both forms, at their best, are only two different means to the same end.

When I was growing up, when someone was a bit crazy, we would say they were '*gonzo*', and sometimes I would elaborate with, 'They're *gonzo* with the windzo.' This is the *gonzo* I'm after, mixed in with the blurring of boundaries propounded by Carl Rhodes' description of fictocriticism as '[a] provocation' (2015, p.289):

the minds of my generation of organisational theorists are haunted by the spectre of scientific discourse, shoehorned into dry genres, bullied by audit regimes that try to wring the passion out of thought. Without gaiety, the science that calls us has no exuberance, it cannot dance. What are the possibilities for writing about organizations that allows the heart's instincts to be followed, the vast possibilities of expression to be explored and enjoyed? I explore this through a form of writing known as fictocriticism – a writing engaged in genre-bending as a literary and theoretical engagement with existence and selfhood.

In terms of *gonzo* this published thing you're now holding operates as a failure since if it had been true to the original sense, I would have written the entire PhD manuscript in one notebook and published it without editing. But true to fictocriticism, it carries out artistic research by blending performance, research, fiction and theory, with a good dose of history, memoir and lived experience thrown in.

<sup>9</sup> In particular Michael Taussig's *I Swear I Saw This* (2011) and *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993).

Over the course of the PhD inquiry I've given multiple presentations in theatrical and institutional contexts and three public seminars, to which I'll be referring throughout these texts. In overview, these public seminars are:

## whitewash

### 30% PhD Seminar

19 April 2016

At the 30% seminar, discussant Professor Daniel Peltz articulates for me the idea of *narrowcasting*. The notion of 'clown alone' emerges from this concept. Narrowcasting is a helpful container for the kind of investigation I'm conducting here, within this research institution, and even more specifically within and through this body I possess, a so-called white Zimbabwean finding themselves a luxurious migrant in Stockholm where my difference is largely invisible.

It's an intra-cultural zoning in, which I connect with scholar, literary theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of 'critical intimacy'.<sup>10</sup> I'm contemplating the transformative potential of perceiving Whiteness as a non-static category. As an explosion of splintering specificities.

STACEY SACKS presents



PERFORMANCE: 19 April 2016 17.30 - 19.00  
PRESENTATION: 20 April 2016 10.00 - 13.00

Stockholm's Konstnärliga Högskola  
Room 502, Linnégatan 87

STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS | STOCKHOLMS KONSTNÄRLIGA HÖGSKOLA

STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS | DR HÖGSKOLA

<sup>10</sup> <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/critical-intimacy-interview-gayatri-chakravorty-spivak/>  
(accessed 23 February 2016).



## luxurious migrant // performing whiteness

### 50% PhD Seminar

28 September 2017

What emerged from the 50% seminar was a reinforcement of the necessity for multiplicity, the sprawl, spidery tentacular expansions and entanglements as being a necessary part of attempting to avoid what author Chimamanda Adichie calls the 'singular story'.<sup>11</sup> To keep the narrative in the realm of the polyphonic. But simultaneously the realisation that there was still a huge amount left to interrogate led me to the vivisection, the slicing into of Whiteness and privilege. And the reason it's a *vivisection* and not dissection or excavation is because Whitenesses' aliveness is ongoing and ever-churning and needs to be uprooted one tiny acknowledgment at a time; small movements towards solidarity, which needs to include processes of retribution, apology and re-distribution.

A core question is: what happens after the acknowledgment, after the apology?

Is it possible that giving close attention to the micro-shifts, to the minutiae of the everyday – is where solidarity potentially resides? Is this being alongside, this 'speaking nearby' (Minh-ha cited in Chen 1992) a key to generating solidarities? Or is it just a signature of my privilege that I imagine this to be a possibility?



STACEY  
SACKS  
28 SEPT 17  
DEBUT LIVE  
VIVE P



<sup>11</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)  
(accessed 12 October 2017).



Stanley G. makes a point at the 50% PhD Seminar  
*luxurious migrant // performing whiteness*, Stockholm, 2017.  
Photo: Ellen Røed

## skin+bones // with-nessing W(w)hiteness

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### 80% PhD Seminar

9 November 2018

This concept of vivisection led me to the 80% seminar. Attempting to deepen understandings of embodied knowledge leads to auto-ethnographic explorations: ancestral journeying, dancing with and for gravestones in Warsaw and with the forests that witnessed Treblinka (also in an effort to understand further: what is an audience?).

This project evokes a research landscape that is extremely wide and almost embarrassingly diverse, ranging from quoting people on Facebook to pop culture, philosophy, political science, visual and cultural anthropology, critical queer and whiteness studies, black speculative feminism, late night comedy shows, new materialist and post-humxn discourse and more.



The following Swedish phrases have accompanied me, faithful companions through this labyrinth, deeply relevant to my project and its questions. The first was offered to me in conversation with my supervisor Kristina Hagström-Ståhl:



While writing this introfucking, several things are happening in the world, as they do. This morning<sup>12</sup> Robert Gabriel Mugabe died. The death of a dictator, 37 years my President.

Zimbabwe is falling apart. 90% unemployment, 17-hour-long daily power-cuts, rampant cholera, a womxn comedian in Harare two weeks ago abducted, stripped, beaten, forced to drink raw sewerage for making comedy sketches about the government.

Current President Mnangagwa 'the crocodile', remains unchallenged besides sanctions that only hurt the people, and continues his gradual militarisation, openly murdering and terrorising ordinary Zimbabweans. At this time of editing (January 2020), the latest from a UN envoy is that Zimbabwe is on the verge of 'manmade starvation' with 60% of the population food insecure.<sup>13</sup>

And the world is distracted by enough other shit to pretend to care. Everywhere it feels

is burning

and this sets the emotional tone for my inquiry.

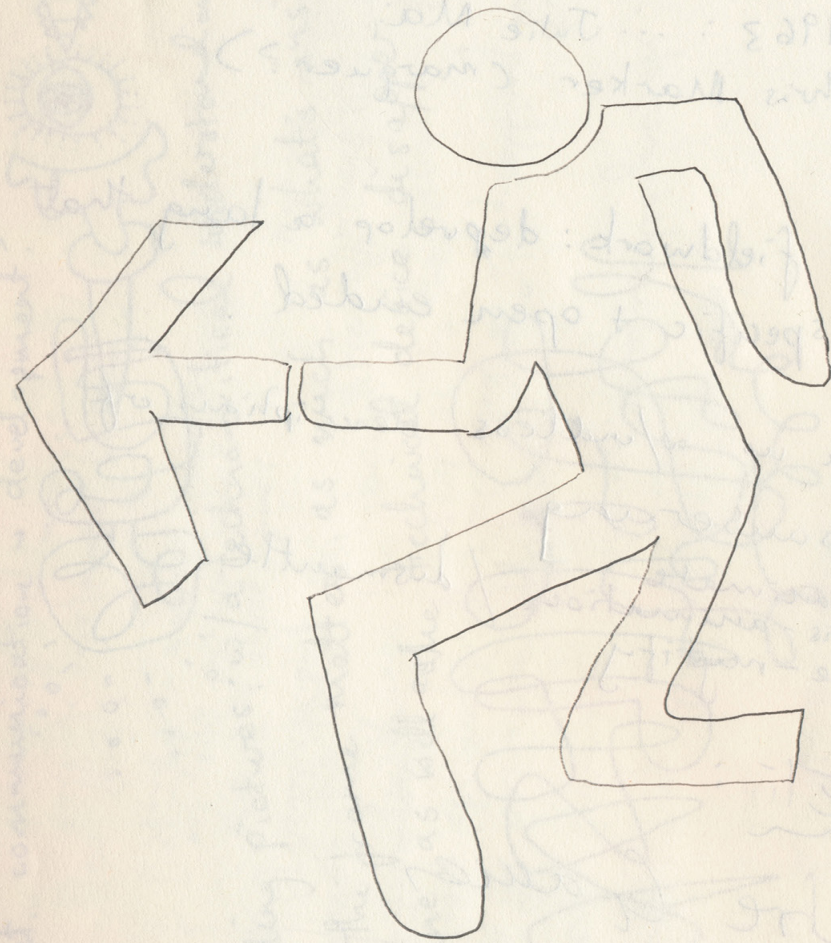
I am incapable of separating my artistic research, entangled as it is with events of the everyday. Sitting in my safe studio in Karlaplan, one of Stockholm's wealthiest areas, I'm with-nessing online the ongoing oppression, humiliation, murder and silencing, the continued stifling of freedom of expression, rampant inequalities, climate catastrophe, insect death, rising fascism, collapse everywhere and the experience of a terrible sense of helplessness.

<sup>12</sup> 6 September 2019.

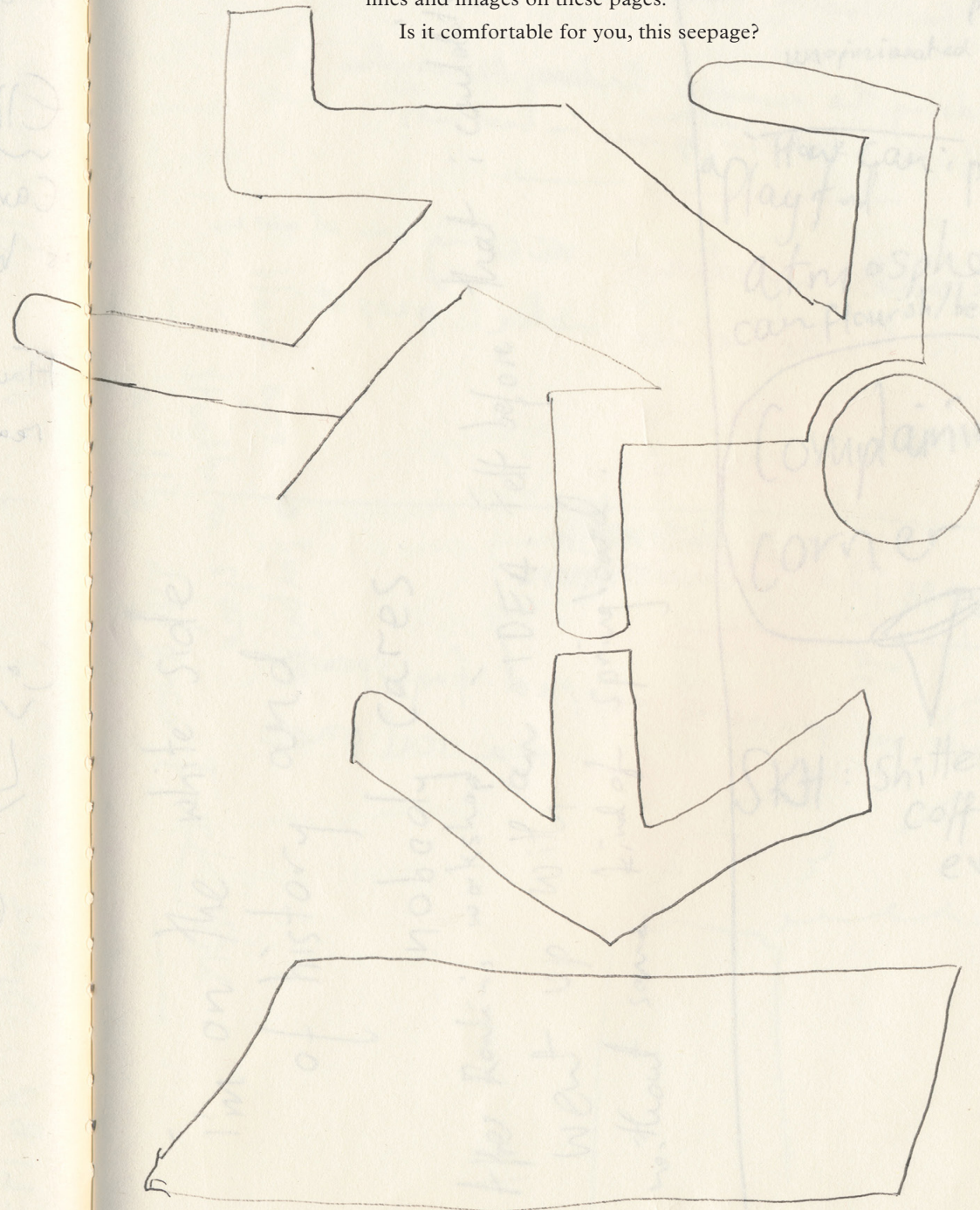
<sup>13</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/nov/29/zimbabwe-on-verge-of-man-made-starvation-warns-un-envoy> (accessed 29 November 2019).

A clown cannot be anywhere else than where they are. The room is the space the people present are in and the world is this world right here and now. At this moment there's you the reader, and me the one way wordy train forcing my and others' thought forms and ideas and images through your eyes into your brain, penetrating your mind-zone-private space, inhabiting you for a while, just a short while, colonising you with im/material data, these words lines and images on these pages.

Is it comfortable for you, this seepage?



while you run  
from rubber bullets  
i run for the bus



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